



United States Mission to the OSCE

OSCE Ministerial Council Plenary Statement

As delivered by Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg
to the Ministerial Council, Athens
December 1, 2009

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And let me join my colleagues in congratulating you and the Greek government on this remarkable stewardship of the OSCE over the past year and the important contributions you've made to building a strong OSCE for the future.

On behalf of Secretary Clinton, it's a privilege to be here today. As I think all of you know, Secretary Clinton is today with President Obama, who tonight will be outlining our views about the way forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan. There is a struggle against violent extremism faced in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is a security challenge that affects us all. And we are grateful for the efforts of so many of the countries that are here today in this common effort. In his remarks tonight, the President will highlight the contribution of the 43 contributing countries to ISAF, as well as the many others who have contributed to the civilian mission in Afghanistan and also the important role of the UN through UNAMA. Together we will be working to develop the capacity of the Afghan government on both the security and the civilian dimensions, as well as supporting Pakistani democracy and its economic future. We continue to believe, as my colleagues have highlighted, that the OSCE can play an important role, as ODIHR's role in the past election has demonstrated, including with respect to areas such as border and police training, good governance, and the rule of law.

Mr. Chairman, the past months of the Corfu process have demonstrated the central role of the OSCE and its ability to bring together all the participating States for a constructive dialogue. We continue to believe that full implementation of the OSCE's existing commitments in all three dimensions will bring a marked improvement to the security situation in Europe. We have to be both innovative and constructive. We look forward to further talks within the Corfu process, which absolutely will bring more confidence and contribute new ideas about how to implement existing commitments and how to tackle cross-dimensional challenges to European security. Like our colleagues, President Obama received President Medvedev's letter containing a draft European security treaty on Saturday. We are studying this proposal carefully, and we welcome the opportunity to continue our ongoing dialogue that has been taking place in the OSCE as part of the Corfu process in order to build a more peaceful and prosperous Europe for the 21st century. We hope today and tomorrow to approve both the declaration and the decision to continue the Corfu process dialogue in 2010 and to produce concrete results.

We continue to embrace a comprehensive approach to security in Europe, which encompasses the political-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions. We also agree with President Medvedev that we need to continue our efforts to adjust to the new and emerging threats to European security. This approach must continue to embrace agreed principles of international relations, including the indivisibility of security, the right of countries to choose

their own alliances and security structures, and the requirement of host country consent for the stationing of foreign forces on their territory. This approach must also build on the existing commitments we have developed together over three decades, as well as the central structures such as the OSCE and NATO that have helped to ensure security in Europe. We look forward to working with the Russian Federation and our other partners in Europe in the days and months to come to further elaborate an agreed approach to these important issues. The strength of the OSCE is in the practical work we do together. In that context, I'd like to highlight some key areas where we hope to see further cooperation.

First, conflict resolution. Conflict resolution is at the heart of the OSCE, and that is what the Corfu process has sought to facilitate. There remains practical work to be done, and the United States has proposed a new mechanism to promote mutual confidence and trust to help avert conflict.

Second, transnational threats and challenges. I am pleased that we can join with the Russian Federation to co-sponsor this important decision that will help set the OSCE on the course toward confronting a new set of challenges and threats that we all face in the 21st century.

Third, energy security. Diverse and reliable energy supplies are clearly important for the security of Europe. The OSCE, with its comprehensive approach to security, is well placed to highlight the links between energy and security. Here, too, we have suggested developing new mechanisms where any potential supply disruptions could be effectively dealt with on a political level.

Fourth, media freedom. This is a core strength of the OSCE and a vital element of any democratic society. We are disappointed that a Ministerial decision on this topic this year seems unlikely, but we believe that the appointment of a new Representative on Freedom of the Media in the coming months will send an important signal of the continuing value we place on ensuring freedom of expression.

Mr. Chairman, the OSCE is still confronted with many challenges. Our efforts to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the Minsk process have greatly contributed to stability between Azerbaijan and Armenia. As one of the co-chairs of the Minsk Group, the United States has committed to seeking a final settlement to the conflict that will ensure long-term stability and economic growth in the region.

The conflict in Georgia remains one of the OSCE's most pressing challenges. Core OSCE principles and commitments were violated. We must restore trust and rebuild confidence. We expect all parties to fulfill their commitments under the August 12 cease-fire agreement, which calls for the withdrawal of Russian forces to positions prior to the start of hostilities and for unhindered humanitarian access. We must continue to work towards a long-term, peaceful resolution to conflict that will provide stability and improve the security, humanitarian, and human rights situations on the ground. We must also pay close attention to these concerns and work to re-establish a status-neutral OSCE presence in Georgia. Lessons from the war in Georgia and constructive discussions through the Corfu process have encouraged us to take this initiative to propose a new crisis intervention mechanism. I hope that you'll all review this and help shape

this proposal while continuing to work on the ongoing conflicts, not only in Nagorno-Karabakh, but also in Moldova.

We also have work to do with respect to our framework for arms control. The confidence- and security-building measures contained in the Vienna Document are being implemented with a high degree of success. But there is room for improvement here, and we look forward to discussing ways to make this instrument more effective. Unfortunately, we face a difficult situation with the CFE Treaty. The United States remains firmly committed to finding a way forward on CFE that addresses the concerns of all states parties and leads to the entry into force of an adapted CFE Treaty. For nearly two years, Russia has not implemented the CFE Treaty, while all other parties continue to do so. Since Russia's conventional forces are the largest in Europe, it is a concern of all, and I urge Russia to look again at this issue. It would be very welcome indeed if Russia participated in the CFE's annual exchange of military information in mid-December, and it would send a strong signal of our common commitment to preserving the benefits of this treaty.

Mr. Chairman, one of the most important parts of our work here is in the human dimension, and there's no better place than here in Athens to focus our efforts on protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. All OSCE participating States have committed to ensure that their laws, regulations, practices, and policies conform with their obligations under international law and are brought into harmony with OSCE principles and commitments.

We commend the activities of ODIHR and particularly value the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw as the premiere forum for representatives of civil society to communicate constructively and on an equal basis with governments. We will continue to support the principle of allowing civil society to freely and independently raise their concerns at OSCE meetings, which has been the long-established practice. We welcome and appreciate the role played by the OSCE's other human dimension institutions, including the Representative on Freedom of the Media, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the three personal representatives on combating religious intolerance, and other experts who help advance solutions to the human rights concerns in the OSCE region. We support the incoming OSCE Chair's intention to hold a high-level conference on tolerance in 2010 to address such issues as anti-Semitism and the need for training for police, prosecutors, and judges to address issues such as hate crimes.

Mr. Chairman, we've listened very carefully as we get ready for the new Chairmanship to the discussions of a potential summit in the coming year. Before deciding on whether to hold a high-level meeting, we should see first some concrete progress on the important issues facing the OSCE that we have been discussing here.

Mr. Chairman, I want to once again thank the Greek Chairmanship for all their efforts and welcome Kazakhstan as the new Chair. The United States pledges to work with you through the Corfu process to help revitalize the OSCE with a remarkable yet simple set of principles that for almost 35 years now has provided hope for greater security and opportunity throughout the Euro-Atlantic area.

Thank you very much.